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ABSTRACT

A booklet intended for parents and other individuals in contact with the blind or visually impaired infant provides suggestions for aiding in the child's growth and development. Presented from the viewpoint of the visually impaired child, the author emphasizes sharpening of the intact senses through such activities as talking to, carrying, and touching the child often. Permitting exploration and providing sound cues are seen to be particularly important. (Author/SB)

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Get a wiggle ON

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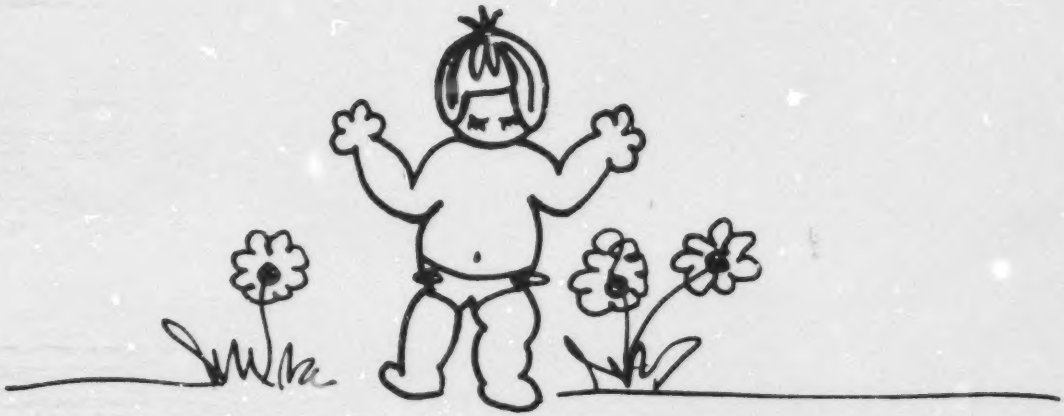
This booklet has been prepared to assist those persons who are in contact with blind or visually impaired infants. It contains suggestions we hope will be helpful to you in assisting these children, early in their lives, to grow and learn like other children.

It is true that blind children are more like than different from other children. BUT THEY ARE DIFFERENT.

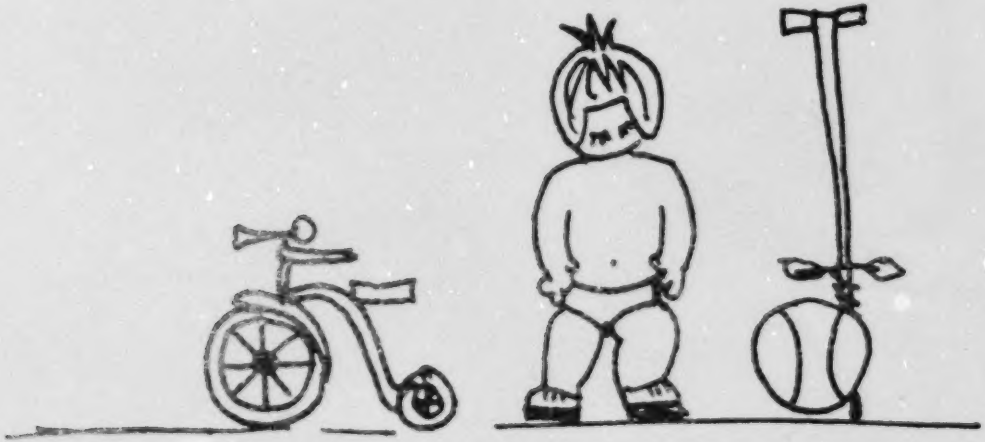
Therefore, it is important that they receive the right attention early so they will develop a framework within which they can interact with the world around them.

It's a fact. I have a visual problem. I may be seriously handicapped by it . . . .



But with your help, I will think about my problems a great deal less than others do. After all, not seeing so well—or not seeing at all—is normal for me.

If you help me, I can learn to use my other senses and any vision I might have left. I will learn to move about and behave like other children.



My five senses—touching, smelling, tasting, hearing, and any little bit of vision I have—are the only avenues through which I can learn. *Think about that!* Everything I know comes in to my brain through these senses! But when one sense is absent or doesn't work very well, the other senses do NOT suddenly get better. They must be developed by being used. In my case, every time you help me substitute touching and listening for seeing, you help me sharpen those senses so they are useful to me; I can *learn* from touching and listening. Try to have me use my fingers, feet, and other skin areas to gain information by touch. Have me use my nose and mouth to find out how things smell and taste. Teach me to use my ears to know the meaning of the sounds around me, and my eyes to use any little bit of remaining vision to see things.

Please tie together all these separate pieces of incoming information for me. Tell me what I am touching, smelling, tasting, hearing, and seeing. I need to be talked to–to learn language. Even more, I need to *understand* what objects are, what they do, what they look like, how they feel. I need to be talked to so that I will know that I am a part of things.

The following pages contain some suggestions that can help me first "wiggle," and then "move it." You'll have other ideas–perhaps some that are better–but these should help to get me started growing.

I've got to wiggle so
that later I'll be able to

Move it!

DON'T LEAVE ME IN MY OVERLY SECURE CRIB. I'll be "good" there, but I can't look around. And not much is going on in there to stimulate my other senses until I learn to move about a little.

Talk to me. Pick me up and carry me about.

CHANGE MY POSITION. If I lie on my back all the time, I could end up with the back of my head permanently flattened. Treat me like any other baby. I won't smother when you put me on my tummy! Instead, I strengthen my neck muscles when I lift my head and move it from side to side. When I am lying on my stomach, tinkle a little bell to encourage me to lift my head up. Put interesting objects within my reach to teach me to seek things to touch.

Don't let me become a flathead.

HANG PLAY GYMS IN MY CRIB--ones that make nice sounds. Encourage me to reach for them. Take my hands and show me where they are. Put some bells on the side of my crib for me to find. Give me some objects that will feel good when I touch them. Talk to me about these things. Tell me what they are--even before you think I can understand. Sighted babies *see* lots of things before they can talk. I need to *know* about lots of things before I can talk. I must touch them, smell them, hear them; but your words have to take the place of my seeing them.

Keep me informed!

PICK ME UP AND CARRY ME ABOUT. Unless you carry me about, I shall probably lie very quietly in my crib and you will think I am *such* a good baby. I will be listening, but I won't know what the sounds are or if they have meaning. Soon I may stop paying attention to what I hear.

I need you—to give meaning to my world.

CARRY ME WITH YOU AS YOU MOVE ABOUT THE HOUSE DOING YOUR WORK. You can even put me in a little cloth sack that hangs down your chest from your neck. While I'm small and don't weigh much, carry me with you in your arms or in the sack. Don't put me in an infant seat yet. I need to feel your closeness and the movements of your body.

Stick close to me and note my little wiggles.

KEEP ME WITH YOU. Tell me what you're doing and what the sounds and your movements mean. Babies who don't see well can't know what makes sounds or what the sounds mean without help. They need to touch the objects and to have someone tell them what it all means. Babies who don't get this help "tune out" and stop paying attention to sounds around them.

Keep me tuned in.

DON'T LEAVE ME LYING DOWN. Pick me up and sit me on your lap facing forward when you are talking with others. When I show I can balance my head, turn me around, hold my hands, and let me rock back and forth. Have me stand UP and sit DOWN.

Help me learn to sit.

TOUCH ME, KISS ME, FONDLE ME, AND GIVE ME LITTLE PATS. I will begin to know you love me. When you leave me by myself and talk to me without touching me, it doesn't mean the same thing. I need to hear you, feel you, and smell you in order to begin to know you're *really* there—and that you *love me.*

Keep in touch

LET OTHER PEOPLE HOLD ME AND TALK TO ME. I have to learn to trust different people. I need to know that I am safe when strange hands and arms carry me and move me about in ways that feel different from the way my mother and father hold me. I need to hear *other* voices—and to know that *different* words and sounds can convey the same meanings.

Share me.

MOVE ME ABOUT THE HOUSE. I'd like one of those old-fashioned bassinets that can be moved from room to room, or a nice pad of blankets that you can move to keep me near you. With me near, you can keep talking to me, telling me what you're doing and what the sounds mean.

When you are not holding me, it's your voice that makes me feel close to you and keeps me in tune with what's happening. I can't glance at you, as you can at me, to keep in touch. A sighted baby can keep track of you with his eyes, but I can only keep track of you through touch or sound.

I want to hear your voice!

DON'T FENCE ME IN. I like my playpen–for a while. It is a handy place for me to learn about some of my toys in a confined area. I can find them more easily in this small environment which I can control. But don't leave me inside too long. Keep me curious about the rest of the house. The playpen is good for me to walk around in when I'm outside, and it is a big object for me to come back to in the room. But put it away when I no longer need it so I can move on to better things.

Playpens are useful–for a while.

LEAVE SOME OF MY TOYS STREWN AROUND THE FLOOR. It's fun for me to find things, and finding interesting things will keep me moving. If you just keep me in a "play area," I won't learn about the rest of the room or the house. While I'm small and learning about my home, I need the *whole house* for my play yard.

Don't be too tidy.

WHEN YOU'RE FEEDING ME, PUT MY HAND ON THE SPOON. Let me feel what you're doing to me. I will learn what I will need to do when I'm ready to feed myself! Tell me what I'm eating. I may not be talking yet, but I'm listening.

Make me part of what's going on.

TAKE MY SHOES OFF WHEN I'M INDOORS. This will help me explore my toes and feet. I really learn about the world using my whole body. With my shoes off inside, I'll learn about the different textures underfoot: rugs, tile, and wood floors. I'll feel the texture of the furniture and the rungs on the sides of my crib. You'll even catch me reaching for my toys with my feet!

Keep my shoes off indoors.

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EVEN BEFORE I CAN WALK, TAKE ME OUTDOORS—OFTEN—AND DESCRIBE THE REST OF THE BIG WORLD TO ME. Not just on sunny days—take me out when it's raining or snowing! When the wind is blowing and when it's storming! Tell me about it and let me feel it. Keep my curiosity about the world alive so I will want to explore later on my own and won't be afraid of the unfamiliar. Let me feel the sunshine, rain, and snow on my skin. Let me hear the wind.

Don't treat me like a hothouse flower.

TAKE MY SHOES OFF OUTSIDE, TOO. There's really no other way I can learn about how a lot of the world feels. My feet come into contact with many things that hands might not even touch--grass, mud, sand, gravel, cement, the road, fallen logs, garden dirt. These are all things I'll learn to recognize with my feet. If I don't take my shoes off, I may never learn about many of them at all.

Let me go barefoot (in places where I can't cut myself).

MY HOME IS MY FIRST PLAYGROUND. When I start to crawl about, leave some of the doors of the kitchen cupboards open. I'd like to find out what's kept there! Let me pull things out that can't harm me. I'll bang on them, chew on them a little, even roll on them! I'll explore and learn about them using all my senses! I may even crawl right into the empty cupboard. If I don't get into one, and can't see into it well, will I *really* know what a cupboard is? Will I know they exist and what interesting things they hold?

Open the door and keep some cupboard space for me. *But first remove anything that can be dangerous to me.*

I LOVE ROCKING HORSES AND ROCKING CHAIRS. I can feel the change of direction in space—and rocking is a pleasant sensation. It is OK for me to rock using a toy or a rocking chair, but discourage me from rocking when I am sitting on the floor or anywhere else. To do this, *you* will have to find something more interesting to do.

I can't be a rock-a-bye baby all the time.

MY PLAYTHINGS AREN'T ALWAYS TOYS. Don't be surprised if I prefer playing with pans, cans, a shoe, or a box in preference to an expensive toy. Remember! I have to find enjoyment *through what I can do with an object*– not because it may have looked interesting to you. It is more important that I find pleasure in it than if it is pretty, new, or expensive.

Keep it simple and I'll really learn about it!

NEW TOYS AND EXPERIENCES MAY FRIGHTEN ME. When you give me something new, I may be afraid of it at first. Go slow. Remember it *really* is all new to me. I've had no previous experience with it and although you may think I'll enjoy it, I have to find out in my own way what it is, whether it makes an interesting sound, that it won't hurt me, and that it feels nice. Keep trying; encourage me to play with it. Be persistent with new things, but be understanding, too.

Don't give me too much of a surprise!!!

GIVE ME SOUND CUES AROUND THE HOUSE. Hang a wind chime near the outside door. Put a loud ticking clock or other fixed objects that regularly make sounds where I will hear them. They will offer me sound cues to help me remember where I am in the house. I'm guided by touch and sound.

Give me some cues!!

WALK ME BACK AND FORTH. While I'm still a little unsteady on my feet, it helps to walk me back and forth along the front of the davenport, then to the chair, and around the coffee table. At the same time that I'm learning how to walk along, I'm also learning about these pieces of furniture and what's kept on the table.

A little support, please.

GIVE ME BIG TOYS THAT I CAN MOVE. I may like to play with toys such as a "crawligator"* before I can walk. I can lie on a crawligator-type toy and pull with my arms, or push myself with my legs. Not only is this good exercise for me, but I can find out that there are *things out there* and I can get to them. Help give me a way to explore and reach out to all those things.

I can get there alone.

*A mechanic's dolly or "creeper" is a good example.

After I have been practicing moving around with the couch and coffee table as support, I'll learn to cruise from the furniture across the room to you, or to the next piece of furniture. At this time, it is important that furniture be left in one position, and not moved about.

Keep the furniture still – and I'll keep moving!

When I'm steady on my feet and pretty sure about getting about the house, *then* you can move the furniture. But please don't do it while I'm napping or visiting grandma. Show me where you are moving it and tell me about the changes. Orient me to where things are so I'll be able to re-orient myself without having to bang into things first.

If you move it–tell me.

I LIKE PUSH TOYS. A sturdy doll buggy is good for me to push around. It gives me something to hang on to, something I can control, and I can take things with me in it. When I am first learning to use it, be sure that it is in a room or an area where you won't mind if I bump into things. It will take a while for me to realize that it bumps into things—or people—before I do!

Buggies can be fun.

WALLS HELP ME GET AROUND. Now that I'm walking, encourage me to follow the walls before I take off into the wide open spaces on my own. I had one map of the house when I was crawling about; now I need to learn about it in this new way. If you lead me around by holding my hand, I'll never be sure enough of myself to try it alone.

If I'm a wall follower, I won't be a wallflower.

STEPS, STEPS–I LOVE STEPS. When I'm little, I like to crawl up them and scooch back down! When I get older, I'll like walking up them and then back down. Don't discourage me from trying, but be sure I know where they are.

Until I'm *very sure of* my environment, though, you should put a gate or door across all stairs so I don't go stepping into space unexpectedly and end up with a broken something-or-other.

I can handle steps–with care.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO LET ME GET DIRTY. You may not want me to get dirty, but when I go outside let me really come in contact with the world. Let me crawl and roll in the grass, wade through the mud puddles, and pour water in the sand. At first, I may not even want to touch these materials, so when I do, let me really get into them. It's the only way I can find out *all* about them.

Everybody needs to be a little pig now'n'then.

I NEED TO PLAY HARD AND KEEP MOVING. As I get bigger, when I'm outdoors I will enjoy having a swingset with a glider and slide, an old tire swing hung in a tree, and a sandbox. With your help, I can learn to play on all these things by myself and other children will enjoy playing on them with me. These are activities all us kids enjoy, especially together.

I like big play equipment.

FENCES KEEP ME SAFE. If the backyard is fenced in, I can *really* safely practice being independent! This is a plus for you because children like to be outdoors in all weather. With a little planning on your part, I can do it on my own. What a neat way to learn about the outdoors and get my exercise.

Fence me in!

SOUNDS ARE MY GUIDES. Sounds help me find my way and locate myself outdoors. Hang a wind chime at the end of the driveway and another one near the house or garage.

When I'm playing in the back yard, it will help me if you turn on a radio placed in the back window or on the back porch. It will help me find my way back to the house.

My world comes alive—to the sound of music.

"See how many wonderful ways you can help me grow!"

Now we've got to really "Move It"

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